

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of North Carolina's Coastal, Tidewater, and Piedmont regions has caused an urgent need to protect significant natural resources in this part of the state. However, before protection of natural resources and natural areas can be accomplished, it is important to have background information about these resources, such as locations of endangered and rare species and delineation and description of significant natural areas. The North Carolina Nature Preserves Act delegates responsibilities to the N.C. Natural Heritage Program for maintaining the statewide inventory of important natural areas and rare species habitats.

Funding from the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study has allowed a reconnaissance inventory to identify, describe, map, prioritize, and make protection recommendations for special natural areas, exceptional wetland ecosystems, and endangered and rare species habitats in the upper drainage basins of the Neuse, Tar, Roanoke, and Meherrin rivers in North Carolina. This area covers 17 counties: Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Granville, Greene, Halifax, Johnston, Lenoir, Nash, Northampton, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake, Warren, Wayne, and Wilson.

To determine which natural areas required survey work, biologists contracted by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program reviewed soil and topographic maps, aerial photos, numerous other reference materials, and consulted biologists familiar with these counties. After surveying many of the sites identified during the preliminary screening, 130 were identified as having biological or physiographical significance at the national, state, or regional level.

This report describes the natural communities, aquatic habitats, endangered and rare species, and geomorphology of the 17-county A/P III study area. It also provides site descriptions and maps of each of the 130 significant natural areas in this region.

Data from this project will be recorded in the N.C. Natural Heritage Program's central inventory management system, which is used by many agencies for environmental impact assessments, land use planning, resource management decisions, and conservation planning. It is hoped that this report will lead to increased protection of the natural heritage of the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound region.